

CABLE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Fiscal Year 2004

Committee Members

Paul Bobrowski, Dennis Bromery, Carlton C. Brose, Paul Lind, Irving Rothberg, W. C. Venman (chairperson), Walter Wolnik (clerk)

Staff

Jeff Comenitz, Kris Pacunas, Roy Rosenblatt

Select Board Liaison

Anne Awad

The Cable Advisory Committee is charged by the Town with overseeing the license granted by the Town to its cable access provider, Comcast, and with negotiating a renewal license with Comcast.

During FY 04 the Committee has met at least monthly. The Committee was reconstituted during FY 04 to prepare for the relicensure process. Messrs. Bromery and Rothberg continued from the FY 03 Committee. New appointments included Messrs Bobrowski, Brose, Lind, Venman and Wolnik. Messrs. Lind and Venman have both had experience in licensure and relicensure. The Committee began FY 04 by meeting with Mr. Brian Merrick, a representative from the Cable Television Division of the Commonwealth's Department of Telecommunications and Energy. Mr. Merrick walked the Committee through the relicensure process and provided material and advice.

Relicensure is regulated by state and federal law, which not only sets the overall time frame for the process, but determines what may and, more importantly, what may not be negotiated. For instance, most of the comments residents make concerning cable television concern what stations/programs are carried and what Comcast charges. Federal law prohibits negotiating either of these subjects. New to the Town since the current license was granted in 1996 is the availability of internet access via cable. Not only is this topic not covered under the current license, but the Federal Communications Commission has determined that internet access is not a cable service at all, and thus can not be negotiated! One is tempted to paraphrase the question asked of Mrs. Lincoln following the assassination of the President: "Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, how was the play?"

The Town is now in that part of the relicensure process called ascertainment, that is, determining what the cable television needs of the Town are. As part of this process, the Committee held a public hearing to offer residents of the Town an opportunity to comment on Comcast's performance and to make suggestions for inclusion in the renewal license. As the Committee determines the Town's needs, it will prepare a draft license to present to Comcast, after which negotiations will begin.

The Committee has also been keeping track of federal and state regulations. In May the Committee filed a Comment to an FCC Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on IP-Enabled

Services, and in June submitted a Comment on the Massachusetts DTE Notice of Inquiry on revising Form 100.

We should also point out that Mr. Pacunas has extensively revised our website and has set up an e-mail address for residents to submit comments to us.

Where are we now? Federal regulation gives the Town adequate time to ascertain the Town's cable television needs. We will take as much time as necessary to do just that. We do not have a specific timetable for beginning negotiations, but our hope was that we could complete a draft license by the end of summer. We're a little behind, but moving along. The regulations do not put any pressure on us to speed things up. At the same time, however, we also continue to be available to residents who need information about the cable or who wish to comment or lodge complaints about cable television service.

Finally, we receive wonderful support from the three assigned staff members. Representing the Town are Messrs. Pacunas and Rosenblatt. Representing the schools is Mr. Comenitz. Messrs. Pacunas and Comenitz provide much needed technical expertise, and Mr. Rosenblatt guides us through the intricacies of Town policies and procedures. We also stay in contact with the Select Board through their liaison with the Committee, Ms. Awad.

For the Committee
William C. Venman, Chairperson